

Comments for the EPA's Public Listening Session  
On the Environment and the Aging

Good afternoon Governor Whitman and distinguished members of the audience. My name is Rick Garrity and I am the Executive Director of the Environmental Protection Commission of Hillsborough County here in Tampa. Our Agency is a full service local environmental regulatory program with over 160 full-time dedicated professionals. Through our authorizing statute, we are responsible for the purity of the air, the waters and the soils of this County.

Many of the environmental standards we enforce are to protect the sensitive groups in our population such as the very young and the elderly. In fact, we are privileged that some 327,000 citizens over the age of 65 call the Tampa Bay area their home. This makes us sensitive to their needs and hence my appearance here today. In my brief comments, I would like to focus primarily on the importance of the federal – local partnership in achieving clean air in Tampa Bay for these sensitive groups.

Prior to 1990, our County was home to two municipal waste incinerators with older pollution control systems; also home to ten older coal-fired electric steam generating boilers, numerous smaller unabated air toxics sources and literally one million 1980's vintage vehicles spewing noxious exhaust over our roads. Following the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, and with the EPA's financial and technical support, and the help of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, we oversaw the clean up of these sources. The garbage recycling burners now control the dioxin/furan emissions, the acid gases, and the heavy metals; the coal-fired electric steam boilers through the acid rain program and tough enforcement of New Source Review have dramatically reduced sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide emissions thus contributing to expected improvements in the water quality of our

Tampa Bay; toxic sources such as perchloroethylene dry cleaners tucked away in residential neighborhoods now recycle their dangerous fumes; and the automobile manufacturers and the petroleum industry have been required to combine forces to make much cleaner vehicles.

The result of all these efforts has been cleaner, healthier air in Tampa and expected improvements in water quality for Tampa Bay. For the first time in several decades we are attaining all the EPA's air quality standards, and emissions of air toxics in our air shed are down.

Now that we have achieved some measure of success, we feel that we need 3 essential items to maintain this momentum:

1. Adequate funding from the EPA to carry out these programs. Typically this funding comes through our Section 105 Clean Air Act grant.
2. Continued technical support from the EPA – particularly our Region IV office. To that end, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the wonderful work of, Beverly Bannister and her Region IV air staff.
3. Open two-way communication on important issues such as new or reformed regulatory programs. We seek the opportunity to provide input and listen firsthand to the EPA's guidance.

Before I conclude my remarks I would also like to mention the important decision before EPA on the disposition of acid wastewater from the bankrupt Piney Point phosphate complex in the shores of southern Tampa Bay. I would like to emphasize the

extraordinary efforts put forth by all parties dealing with the estimated 1.5 billion gallons of acid water at that site and urge careful and speedy consideration of the thoughtful multi-front proposal put forth by the FDEP and their request for an emergency permit for dispersion of treated water to the Gulf of Mexico. Continuing nitrogen discharges to Tampa Bay could significantly set back past achievements to clean up the Bay and worse yet a disastrous berm break could wreak havoc on the bay.

With that I will conclude my comments but let you know that we in the Tampa Bay area and Hillsborough County appreciate your being here today to listen to us and we extend a cooperative hand to you to help further improve our environment.